

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

Historic name Atlas Block

Other names/site number Annin-Jacobs-Mulvihill Block/24ST0626

2. Location

street & number 523 and 528 East Pike Avenue

☐ not for publication

city of town Columbus

☒ vicinity

State Montana

code MT

county Stillwater

code 095

zip code 59019

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this x nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property x meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

 national statewide X local

Signature of certifying official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

 entered in the National Register

 determined eligible for the National Register

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain:)

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private
☐ public - Local
☐ public - State
☐ public - Federal
☐ private

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box)

- ☐ building(s)
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☒ building(s)
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
		sites
1		structures
		Objects
		buildings
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant = Bar

COMMERCE/TRADE/department store = general store

SOCIAL/meeting hall = hall of other fraternal org.

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/restaurant = Bar

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY
AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commerical Style-
Western Commercial Style

RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility,
music facility

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: STONE: Sandstone

walls: STONE: Sandstone

roof: WOOD, SYNTHETICS

other:

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The Atlas Block consists of one contributing building, a two-story sandstone commercial building in the city of Columbus, Montana. Columbus is situated within the Yellowstone River Valley in southcentral Montana near the confluence of the Yellowstone River and the Stillwater River in southcentral Montana. The Atlas Block stands mid-block between the two-story former Columbus Mercantile Building to the east and a modern one-story concrete block building to the west. The Atlas Block occupies approximately two city lots and faces south onto Pike Avenue, Columbus's main street. Pike Avenue is a wide public thoroughfare that parallels the former Northern Pacific railroad tracks to the south. The Atlas Block is two bays wide exhibiting recessed entries, display windows, transoms, and symmetrical upper facades. The façade of the Atlas Block illustrates ornate use of the stone that enhances the Pike Avenue commercial district and provides a strong sense of economic stability for the small town.

Narrative Description

The Atlas Block is a two-story sandstone Western Commercial building that stands as one of five early twentieth century sandstone buildings that front Pike Avenue in Columbus, MT. Pike Avenue is the primary east/west travel corridor (once along the Yellowstone Trail and now US Highway 10) that passes through Columbus and serves as its main street. The avenue is a broad thoroughfare that parallels the former Northern Pacific Railway tracks (now Montana Rail Link and Burlington-Northern Santa Fe Railroad) to the south. A wide tree-lined grass-covered linear park within the original railroad right-of-way (now owned by the City of Columbus) separates the tracks from Pike Avenue.

The Atlas Block is an architecturally designed commercial building constructed of locally quarried sandstone. It stands mid-block between the former two-story sandstone Columbus Mercantile Company building (now the Stillwater Mining Company) to the east (right) and a modern one-story concrete block building to the west (left). The Atlas Block is not rectangular in its massing as the two sides of the buildings do not have equal depth.

The Atlas Block consists of two sections: the west section consists of the Atlas Bar and the east section consists of the former Annin and Banks Dry Goods store. The Atlas Bar measures 25 feet in width by 140 feet long and extends to the alley. The former Annin and Banks Dry Goods measures 20 feet wide by 104 feet long, whose depth corresponds to the neighboring Columbus Mercantile Building. The former Annin and Banks Dry Goods only extends in depth as far as its party wall with the Columbus Mercantile Company building (now the Stillwater Mining Company office). Not quite sure what is meant. Is it refereing to a common wall?

The building has a sandstone foundation and full basements under each section. A recently installed membrane roof covers the flat roof. Two brick chimneys protrude near the rear of the building. Rectangular metal vent caps are evenly spaced along the roof line of the west wall. These vents pass through the west wall from the basement.

The Atlas Block façade is framed with two rusticated sandstone ashlar pilasters at each end and one at the center of the façade. All pilasters project slightly from the façade wall and culminate approximately one foot above the façade wall. A sandstone cap finishes the pilasters. A single row of sandstone quoins accents the west corner where it is visible over the neighboring one-story building.

The pilasters create two nearly identical bays although the east portion is narrower than the west portion. The lower facades both exhibit deep recessed bays, large display windows and secondary entrances. The upper facades display identical fenestration patterns and overall, mirror each other in design.

The Atlas Bar's lower façade is nearly symmetrical and has its main entry door centered in the recessed entry.¹ The main entry holds a massive glass wood door with brass rails on the exterior (flat) and interior (round). A brass kickplate covers the lower portion of the door. Above the door, a transom opens inward for ventilation. The main door is flanked to each side by a fixed side-light.

¹ Fire code requirements changed the door to open outward instead of inward.

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Display windows fill the canted entry to either side of the main door. Original wood frames hold the display windows of clear glass panes. The west display window has original brass mullions for the vertical and horizontal divisions. The east display window was recently broken and required emergency replacement with plate glass (the owner has kept the original mullions). The apron beneath the display windows is framed with non-historic wood beveled boards.

Two secondary entrances are located at either end of the lower façade wall. The east entrance opens into what originally was the Ladies sitting area and now serves as the game room. This east entrance holds a wood screen door and a glass wood door with replacement glass that reads "The Atlas Casino" in script lettering. The west entrance originally provided access to the cigar stand and the bowling alley in the basement but is no longer used. The door is a solid two-panel wood door framed to each side by narrow side lights.

A fixed metal awning extends full length across the façade above the storefront. The lower façade is finished with a fixed four-light transom that crosses the façade wall topped by a polished sandstone band. A molded sandstone cornice enhances the façade and delineates the division between the lower and upper façade. It further frames the lower façade set off by the two pilasters.

The second story façade remains intact and is highly symmetrical in its appearance. Two courses of sandstone ashlar separate the cornice from the window arrangement. The upper façade exhibits two window openings, both with narrow smooth sandstone sills and wide polished sandstone lintels. Each opening is filled with the original triple set of one-over-one double-hung wood sash windows topped with small transoms. Exterior non-historic wood shutters protect the windows. A single sandstone ashlar block stands vertically between the two lintels.

The frieze is enlivened with a projecting band of sandstone that frames a decorative checkerboard patterned panel. The checkerboard is created by alternating small square blocks of rock-faced ashlar sandstone with polished sandstone. Above the decorative frieze is a single sandstone course that finishes the façade wall. A sandstone cap completes the wall. A plastic Atlas Bar sign projects from the center of the wall.

The Annin and Banks Dry Goods lower façade (east bay) is similar to the Atlas Bar and exhibits most of the same design features. While the recessed entry has been retained, the storefront has been altered with anodized aluminum display windows, a wood apron and paneling above the display windows.²

The secondary access to the upper floor is situated at the west end of the lower façade and is recessed between the sandstone wall and the back of the storefront window. It is approached by a single sandstone step that curves into the apron of the recessed entry. The entry has a glass wood door topped by a transom.

The storefront is protected by a fixed wood pent roof covered with wood shingles. Above this non-historic feature, the remainder of the façade is nearly identical to the Atlas Bar facade with the transom windows, polished sandstone band and sandstone cornice. The upper façade mirrors the west upper façade with one exception; no vertical stone block occurs between the lintels.

The walls at the rear and side of the Atlas Block are irregularly coursed rough-cut sandstone. The west wall of the Atlas Block extends to the alley and exhibits five windows openings across its lower level and two window openings at the second story near the north (rear) of the building. All original openings are intact and exhibit rock-faced ashlar sandstone sills and polished sandstone lintels. From north to south on the lower level, three window opening are boarded shut with plywood painted white. The fourth opening is bricked up at the bottom half and holds an air conditioning unit on the upper half. The fifth opening is also bricked on the bottom half and boarded shut with plywood on the upper half. The upper story has only two window openings near its north end and both hold replacement one-over-one double-hung vinyl windows. The replacement windows are smaller than the opening so horizontal lapped boards enclose the remaining space at the top.

The north end wall of the Atlas Bar faces onto the alley. It is symmetrical in appearance with a row of four window openings at the upper level and a row of three window openings plus a rear entry at the first floor. All window openings exhibit rock-faced ashlar sandstone sills and polished sandstone lintels. The upper level windows hold the same replacement one-over-one double-hung vinyl windows as the west wall with the wood infill.

At ground level, a replacement metal door fills the north end wall entrance topped by a tall transom opening with security bars. The transom is finished with a polished sandstone lintel whose height corresponds with the lintels over the window openings. Two of the window openings are boarded shut with plywood and the third opening has been mostly enclosed except for a small area filled with glass block to provide light to the men's room.

² The concrete entry floor has a dark band corresponding with the canted entry but has an off-center rectangular dark block in the middle.

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The exposed east wall of the Atlas Bar continues the symmetry with two window openings widely spaced at each level. Again, all exhibit rock-faced sandstone ashlar sills and polished sandstone lintels. The ground floor windows both have been enclosed, the north window boarded shut with plywood and the south window exhibiting glass blocks set in concrete at the upper portion of the opening. The upper windows hold the same replacement windows as the west and north walls.

The rear wall of Annin and Banks Dry Goods faces north towards the alley and is fairly symmetrical in its openings. Again, all openings exhibit rock-faced sandstone ashlar sills and polished sandstone lintels. The lower level has a central door flanked to each side with squares window openings. The west window has two small vertical fixed windows while the east holds a fixed clear pane of glass. A metal double replacement door (the original door sits just inside the entry) fills the entrance and is topped by a transom now covered with plywood. The upper level has a row of three evenly spaced windows opening across the wall, two filled with replacement one-over-one double-hung vinyl windows and one that retains the original wood frame minus glazing.

Interior

The crowning glory of the Atlas Block is the Atlas Bar interior with its open floor plan. As you enter the Atlas Bar, you are immediately struck by the high metal ceilings as you pass two elk mounts on either side on your approach to the historic front and back bar. The high decorative metal ceilings pressed with both simple and ornate designs extend the entire length of the building. Ribbed metal sheeting softens the wall and ceiling juncture. The walls are of lathe and plaster construction throughout.

At the front of the building are low paneled walls to either side of the main entry door that encompass small spaces. To the right is the original Ladies sitting room that has been transformed into the game room. Originally accessed by a separate door from the outside, at one time there was a bell or buzzer system to request drinks.³

On the opposite wall are two rooms defined by the panel walls: the Ladies bathroom and the bar office. The Ladies bathroom is directly across from Ladies sitting room, so again the ladies did not have to enter the bar area. It is entered by an original wide wood door reading "LADIES ONLY" on the upper glass. The office space holds two safes, one that reads Wheat Basin National Bank, which presumably moved to the Atlas when that bank closed.

The Atlas is the proud owner of a Brunswick-Balke-Collender mahogany front and back bar that dominates the bar. This magnificent ornate bar features three half arches adorned with lion heads stemming from Corinthian columns.⁴ A second Brunswick back bar on the opposite wall is now used only for decoration.

The walls and many flat surfaces are covered with animal mounts and most have stories to tell. In the 1920s, Minnie Driver roped the wolf which was reportedly the last wolf killed in Stillwater County. Killed on an island in the Great Salt Lake, the buffalo head was sent to Mulvihill by a doctor friend from New York. The elk with the deformed horn was said to have been shot with a pistol on Huntley Flat outside of Columbus by Nelson Miller. And the stories go on.

Four wood benches line the left wall. The original billiard room (with its recently refinished original oak flooring) occupies most of the back half of the bar. The men's room and poker room occupy the rear of the building.

The Annin and Banks Dry Goods portion of the building also exhibits high decorative pressed metal ceilings, lathe and plaster walls and a sky-light boarded shut. The original open floor plan is only partially disturbed in the front for retail and the rest is used for storage and bar supplies.

The secondary exterior door on the Annin and Banks Dry Goods section opens onto a straight stairway with a wood hand rail along its east wall. The second floor is divided by a central hallway composed of the bearing wall to the west and a curtain wall to the east. Hallway elements include wide baseboards, two fixed single pane openings on the west wall; slightly projecting fluted columns and two doors with transoms within the hall itself, all darkly stained. All walls are lathe and plaster and the entire second floor has high decorative metal ceilings. From the top of the stairs, the hallway extends almost to the end of the building where a small room is located.

Above the Atlas Bar is a large open room entered at the top of the stairs through solid five panel wood double doors (one narrow and one wide).⁵ High baseboards frame the walls. Windows at the south end wall and a skylight (now boarded

³ Lars Swanson Interview with Joan L. Brownell, 4 March 2011, Columbus, MT.

⁴ Originally a billiards table manufacturer, the company merged with two other companies in 1884 and expanded their product line to "elaborate and ornate front and back bars made of rich woods, flawless mirrors and stained glass." The success of these back bars allowed the company to construct a new factory in Dubuque, Iowa. See <http://www.brunswickbilliards.com>.

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shut) near its center provided natural illumination for the room. Slightly protruding square columns, framed to appear fluted, are spaced along the east wall of the room and correspond with the columns along the hallway.

Above Annin and Banks Dry Goods, the curtain wall features five door openings with transoms (all doors have been removed and stored elsewhere). Open frame partition walls indicate these spaces have changed over time. Along the east wall are five high rectangular windows, now all boarded shut with brick. A sky-light, now boarded shut, is situated slightly off-center above the floor. Robert Miller, a local resident who grew up in Columbus, remembers when he was a boy, you could walk around the sky-light. It had a guard rail around it and was filled with frosted glass so you couldn't see into the store below.⁶

Integrity

The Atlas Block retains excellent integrity in most respects. It stands in its original location. The setting is unchanged with the Atlas Block fronting Pike Avenue with the railroad tracks beyond. The east half of this city block is occupied with historic sandstone commercial buildings while the west half has experienced changes due to alterations to facades or introduction of new buildings.

The Atlas Block is an architecturally designed building that retains its overall integrity of design, workmanship and materials. The stone pilasters and decorative frieze of the façade exhibits skilled stone workmanship, and the high quality of the locally quarried sandstone. The upper façade reflects its original nearly symmetrical appearance. The lower two-bay facades retain their original arrangement with recessed entries, secondary entrances, display windows and transoms. Some modifications have occurred over the years, particularly the east portion with its replacement aluminum storefront and the rear window replacements. Most alterations to the Atlas Bar façade are due primary to the nature of the business.

The interior of the Atlas Bar is unquestionably one of the most intact historic bars in Montana. Although originally two separate spaces, the bar today appears much as it did after Prohibition was repealed in 1933. The high decorative metal ceilings, lathe and plaster walls, the recently restored oak wood floor, the historic front and back Brunswick bar and the infamous mounts of elk, wolf, bison, deer and other animals that grace the walls allow the visitor to step back in time. Metal decorative ceilings are intact on both floors of the entire building.

The Atlas Block conveys its original design intent and retains a high level of integrity as both a historically and architecturally significant property.

⁵ This room originally extended to the rear of the building but fire code required the present owner to put in a partition wall creating two rooms. The new space at the back of the building is now used as the owner's office. The present owner also built a stairway to reach the roof when he had the roof redone.

⁶ Robert Miller, phone interview with Joan L. Brownell, March 19, 2011.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce

Social History

Period of Significance

1915-1961

Significant Dates

1915

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Curtis Oehme/architect

Period of Significance (justification)

The Period of Significance encompasses the date the New Atlas Bar was constructed in 1915 through the historic period to 1961.

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Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

Historically, the Atlas Block is significant under criteria A and Criteria C at a local level of significance as an early twentieth century commercial building constructed of stone in the town of Columbus, Montana. The Atlas Block has continuously served the residents of Stillwater County, by providing both goods and entertainment since it opened its doors in 1916. Historically, the Atlas Bar is the historic gathering place of the small town, providing a respite from everyday concerns. The Dry Goods store provided a community anchor by supplying everyday items. Architecturally the Atlas Block holds an association with a regionally important stone quarry. The substantial nature of the sandstone building represents the importance of commerce to the town in the early twentieth century and a sense of permanence to the community.

Narrative Statement of Significance (provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance)

The Atlas Block is significant under Criterion A as a vital component to the economic stability of the business district of Columbus. The street level retail businesses within the Atlas Block served the town of Columbus and local population of Stillwater County. Two mainstay retail businesses, the Annin & Banks Dry Goods followed by Miller's Dry Goods occupied the east portion of the Atlas Block during most of the period of significance from its opening to the early 1960s

The Atlas Bar in the west section of the Atlas Block is a landmark saloon in Montana. The Atlas Bar has continuously served the entertainment needs of citizens of Columbus, Stillwater County and Montana since it first opened its doors in 1916. From the early days, through prohibition and the depression, the war years and the ensuing post war years and prosperous 1950s, the Atlas Bar has been a fixture in Columbus, providing local cowboys, farmers, ranchers and businessmen a gathering place to discuss the day's business and to relax in the company of their peers. Owned by the same family until the late 1990s, the Atlas Bar is symbolic of the importance of the saloon in the West as a gathering place for men of the community. For many years, the Atlas also provided entertainment for the community with its dance floor, the bowling alley and a woman's sitting room.

The Atlas Block is significant under Criterion C as an architecturally designed early nineteenth-century commercial property. The Atlas Block is an excellent well-preserved example of commercial stone construction of locally quarried sandstone from the Columbus Quarry northeast of the town of Columbus. The Atlas Block exhibits a high quality of stonework with its stone pilasters and unaltered upper façade with decorative stone elements. The Atlas Block stands basically unchanged with some alterations to its lower façade and rear windows. The Atlas Block established a sense of permanency for the town of Columbus in the early twentieth century and has stood for almost a hundred years as one of the primary business blocks.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

The Atlas Block is located in the broad Yellowstone River Valley of south central Montana. The river passes between high bluffs composed of Eagle Sandstone that formed about sixty million years ago during the late Cretaceous. The sandstone is sediment laid down underwater when this part of Montana was submerged under an inland seaway. The Beartooth Mountains dominate the horizon to the south of Columbus, while the Crazy Mountains are visible to the northwest of the community. The Stillwater River empties into the Yellowstone about one-half mile west of the historic property.⁷

Archeological evidence indicates that the Crow people resided in the Montana-Wyoming area for well over five-hundred years and possibly longer. The Crow people call themselves Apsaalooke, or "Children of the Large Beaked Bird" and historically recognized three tribal divisions of which two ranged in the vicinity of Columbus, Montana. These two divisions include the River Crow who ranged from the Yellowstone River north to the Milk River, and the Mountain Crow who lived in

⁷ David Alt and Donald W. Hyndman, *Roadside Geology of Montana*, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing, 1986), 187.

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southern Montana and northern Wyoming, with the Black Hills marking the eastern edge of their territory and present-day Livingston, Montana on the Yellowstone River bounding the western extent of their territory.⁸

Captain William Clark and 22 members of the Corps of Discovery traveled down the Yellowstone River past the mouth of the Stillwater River on July 20, 1806. Clark noted the river's Crow name, the Itch-ke-pe (Rose) ar-ja (river) in his journal. Concurrent with the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Canadian North West Company trader Antoine LaRocque explored much of the Yellowstone River basin in an attempt to establish trade with the Crow Indians on behalf of his employer. Within just a few years, both Canadian and American fur trappers and traders began working the area to tap into the lucrative Crow trade. The fur companies established a system of trading posts on the Yellowstone to corner that trade beginning in 1807. By the late 1840s, the Yellowstone River and its tributaries were well known to Euro-Americans and an active trade had been established with the Crows.⁹

The town of Columbus is situated on lands originally designated Crow Indian Reservation by the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty. Crow Territory encompassed all lands (an estimated 38 million acres) south of the Musselshell River between the headwaters of the Yellowstone River to the west, the headwaters of the Powder River to the east and the main ridge of the Wind River Mountains in Wyoming as its south boundary. The Mountain Crow occupied the land south of the Yellowstone River while the River Crow occupied the territory north of the Yellowstone. The Sioux and Blackfeet constantly threatened the Crow within this territory and pushed them towards the southcentral region of Montana. After the discovery of gold in southwestern Montana in the 1860s, continuous pressures by non-Indians gradually resulted in several reductions to the original Crow Indian Reservation boundaries.¹⁰

The discovery of gold in southwestern Montana in 1862 had a significant impact on the Yellowstone River basin. Rumors of gold drew prospectors to the Yellowstone River Valley beginning in 1863 with a rich gold strike on Emigrant Creek, a tributary of the Yellowstone within Crow territory. James Stuart, Sam Hauser, and several other men mounted an expedition in 1863 to prospect for gold on the lower Yellowstone, also within Crow territory. Their presence brought them into direct, and often violent contact, with the Indians. In 1863, John Bozeman and John Jacobs blazed a trail between the Overland Trail in Wyoming and the Gallatin Valley in Montana. It passed through key hunting grounds claimed by the Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Crow Indians. The Bozeman Trail crossed the Stillwater River about twenty miles south of Columbus. The Lakota and Northern Cheyenne fought back against Euro-American incursions and successfully pushed the US Army out of its territory and closed the Bozeman Trail to wagon traffic in 1868.¹¹

The Crows, however, chose not to oppose the trail and, instead, allied themselves with the US Army. The Crows, cognizant of the fact that Anglos were invading their historic homeland, agreed to a second treaty in 1868. The 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty with the Crows severely restricted their reservation, removing all lands north of the Yellowstone River, all lands in Wyoming south of Montana Territory's southern boundary and east of a line between the Big Horn and Powder Rivers. An 1880 agreement ratified in 1882 eliminated all Crow lands west of the Boulder River. The Crow Tribe also ceded a wide strip of land near the present-day town of Red Lodge, allowing for the development of recently discovered coal deposits. Lands south of the Yellowstone River within today's Stillwater County remained Crow Territory until the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Even before the north side of the Yellowstone was removed from Crow Territory and despite the presence of sometimes hostile Lakota and Northern Cheyenne warriors, two men, named Mithof and Kaufman, illegally established a trading post

⁸ The third division, The Kicked In The Bellies, traveled from the Bighorn Mountains to the Wind River Range in central Wyoming. Information on the Crow Tribe is derived primarily from *The Apsáalooke (Crow Indians) of Montana Tribal Histories* Little Big Horn College, Crow Agency, MT, accessed at <http://lib.lbhc.cc.mt.us/history>.

⁹ Gary E. Moulton, ed., *The Definitive Journals of Lewis & Clark: Over the Rockies to St. Louis*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 209; Mark H. Brown, *The Plainsmen of the Yellowstone: A History of the Yellowstone Basin*, (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1962), 25-32; Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, (Helena: State Publishing, 1942), 48-49, 56-57.

¹⁰ Treaty of Ft. Laramie, 1851, Charles J. Kappler, ed. and comp. *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties 2 vols.*, vol. 2 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1904), 594-596. Crow treaties and agreements are available in Kappler at <http://www.digital.library.okstate.edu/kappler/>. For a discussion of reductions to the Crow Reservation, see William M. Brooke, "A Contest over Land: Nineteenth Century Crow-White Relations," *Montana Vistas: Selected Historical Essays* ed. Robert Swartout, Jr., (Washington, DC: University Press of America, Inc., 1981), 1-24 and Burton M. Smith, "Politics and the Crow Indian Land Cessions, 1851-1904," *Montana, The Magazine of Western History* 36:4 (Autumn 1986), 24-37.

¹¹ Burlingame, *The Montana Frontier*, 86, 132-33; Brown, *The Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, 13-33; James McClellan Hamilton, *History of Montana: From Wilderness to Statehood*, (Portland, Oregon: Binford & Mort, 1957), 173-75.

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and saloon, known as Eagle's Nest, on the north side of the Yellowstone River across from the mouth of the Stillwater River in 1865. The men traded with the Crow, Lakota, and Northern Cheyenne Indians. They also traded with emigrants on the Bozeman Trail until the Indians closed the trail in 1868. Like many trading posts located just outside the boundaries of reservations, it catered to a primarily Indian clientele and much of its profits came from the sale of whiskey. When the Seventh Cavalry passed through the area in 1875 while escorting railroad surveyors it "did not encounter a single person between Coulson [sic] and Mission except for the folks . . . at Eagle's Nest. It was a dangerous route."¹²

In 1875, the movement of Crow Agency from Fort Parker on the Yellowstone River at Mission Creek to the upper Stillwater River country brought two other traders, Horace and Charles Countryman. These two men moved their ranch down the Yellowstone River to a site near Mithoff and Kaufman's Eagle's Nest. The Countrymans went into business with Hugo Hoppe and William H. Norton and the operation also consisted of a trading post and saloon. In addition, the men operated a toll road west of the settlement and a cable ferry across the Yellowstone River just to the south of their operation. The Countrymans would play a significant role in the settlement of the Columbus area.¹³

Like Mithof and Kaufman, the Countrymans and their partners traded mostly with the Crows with much of their profits based on the sale of bad whiskey to the Indians. Indeed, their Euro-American customers soon called their operation Sheep Dip, because the alcohol distilled there "tasted more like insecticide than whiskey;" not surprising since the Countrymans intended the vile concoction for the Indians and not for Euro-American consumption. The Countrymans had earned a reputation as whiskey traders by 1876. In April 1876, General John Gibbon's "Montana Column," camped near the trading post on its way down the Yellowstone River to rendezvous with General Alfred Terry and Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer during the campaign against the Lakota and Northern Cheyenne. Lieutenant James Bradley described Countryman's operation as "the last occupied house on the Yellowstone. It is a trading establishment, whiskey being the principal commodity, and the customers primarily being the Crow Indians."¹⁴

In 1879, as the Northern Pacific Railroad advanced its transcontinental railroad through eastern Montana, it became obvious to the residents of Sheep Dip that the railroad would pass through the Yellowstone Valley near them. The residents changed the name of their little settlement to Stillwater in the hopes of enticing the railroad to include it on its mainline and began development of the Countryman trading post site. As the railroad neared the settlement, Stillwater included three saloons, the Stillwater Hotel, several dwellings, a blacksmith shop, and general store. The railroad, however, was not pleased with the site of the "town" and established its station one-half mile east of the old trading post in 1882.¹⁵

There is no indication that the Northern Pacific Railway platted the original townsite of Stillwater (today's Columbus) but the town developed similar to other railroad towns in an orderly geometric pattern. In 1889, Patrick Lavelle purchased approximately 28 acres located in the NW1/4 of Section 27, T2S R20E from the Northern Pacific Railway. That same year, he platted his Lavelle's Addition to the town of Stillwater within this acreage, all north of the tracks. Lavelle's Addition is arranged with a single main business street called Pike Avenue parallel to the Northern Pacific Railway right-of-way and streets for businesses and residences are perpendicular to Pike Avenue and the tracks. Horace Countryman followed

¹² *Montana Place Names: From Alzada to Zortman*, (Helena: Montana Historical Society Press, 2009), 52; Don Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing, 1999), 346; Clyde Reichelt, "Captain Clark Spent a Week in 1806 on Site of Columbus, *The Great Falls Tribune*, 22 June 1958; Jim Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2 (Billings: Reporter Printing & Supply, 1964), 22.

¹³ Born in Ohio in 1824, Horace arrived in Montana Territory from California in 1866. For a while, he operated stamp mills at Virginia City, Philipsburg, and Highland before moving to the Yellowstone Valley in 1873. When the agency relocated to the upper Stillwater, they simply packed up and moved downriver with it. Jim Annin, *Horace Countryman: Unsung Hero*, (Privately Published, no date), 1-2; Roberta Carkeek Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana: The Story of Montana's Place Names*, (Missoula: Mountain Press Publishing, 1990), 59; Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, 347; Brown, *Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, 356-57; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, p. 22; Reichelt, "Captain Clark;" Albert L. Babcock, *An Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley*, (Spokane: Western Historical Publishing Co., 1907), 308; M. A. Leeson, *History of Montana, 1739-1885*, (Chicago: Warner, Beers & Company, 1885), 1362-63.

¹⁴ *Montana Place Names*, 52; Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, 347; Brown, *Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, 356-57; James H. Bradley, *The March of the Montana Column: A Prelude to the Custer Disaster*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961), 37-38; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, p. 24; Reichelt, "Captain Clark."

¹⁵ Annin, *Horace Countryman*, 1; *Montana Place Names*, 52; Brown, *Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, 357; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, pp. 23-26; Reichelt, "Captain Clark;" Babcock, *Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley*, 308; Montana Land Tract Books, Volume 71, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana.

Atlas Block

Name of Property

Stillwater County, MT

County and State

Lavelle in 1891 and formalized his plat of the town of Stillwater encompassing the NE1/4 of Section 28, T2S R20E and consisting of blocks (complete and incomplete) on either side of the Northern Pacific Railroad tracks. Long-time residents Horace and Charles Countryman, Pat Lavelle, and William H. Norton owned much of the townsite either through various land laws or purchase of railroad land.¹⁶

The Northern Pacific Railroad officially christened the town Stillwater and it soon became the trading center for a large cattle and sheep ranching area. In 1890, the federal government negotiated another agreement with the Crow Tribe (ratified in 1892) for a further reduction of their reservation. On October 15, 1892, a vast territory south of the Yellowstone River became available for ranching and homesteading.¹⁷

In 1893, the Northern Pacific changed the name of the community to Columbus because of confusion with Stillwater, Minnesota. Yellowstone Valley booster and historian Albert Babcock later wrote of Columbus that

[I]t did not grow up as rapidly as did many of the towns which came into being with the building of the railroad, and there was no "boom period" there. A prosperous trade was enjoyed by the few business houses that constituted the town, however, and [Columbus] became known early as one of the substantial towns of Yellowstone County.

Horace Countryman and Joe Kem built a timber toll bridge across the Yellowstone River south of the community in 1893. The bridge and the railroad made Columbus the second most important community in Yellowstone County after Billings. By 1894, Columbus had four grocery stores, a general store, five saloons, a weekly newspaper, bakery, blacksmith shop, hotel, and a harness shop. It boasted a population of 150 in 1895.¹⁸

By far the most significant business was the Annin and DeHart Mercantile Company. Founded in 1892 by James B. Annin and Hugh DeHart, the business sold just about everything that was needed by local and area residents and was housed in a wood frame building south of the tracks. The business incorporated as the Columbus Mercantile Company in February 1898 with Annin and three new partners including Henry I. Grant, Levi B. Banks and Leonard Ekwortzel and claimed a capital stock of \$25,000. By 1900, the Columbus Mercantile Company was housed in a two-story sandstone commercial building along Pike Avenue facing the railroad tracks.¹⁹

At the turn-of-the-twentieth century, Columbus had a population of 175 individuals and was an important agricultural trading and shipping point in the Yellowstone Valley. Columbus grew steadily and had a solid business base. The community incorporated in 1907. The 1909 Enlarged Homestead Act had a profound impact on Columbus as hundreds of families flooded into the former Crow Reservation south of the Yellowstone and onto the benchlands north of the city. Columbus was an important trade center with access to national markets through the Northern Pacific Railroad. By 1910, the population of Columbus had grown to 521 people. In March 1913, the Montana State Legislature created Stillwater County from portions of Carbon, Sweet Grass, and Yellowstone counties. The Legislature designated Columbus as the county seat.²⁰

¹⁶ "Plat of the Town of Stillwater Yellowstone County Montana," on file, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT; Deed Book 2, Pg 342, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County, Columbus, MT; "Plat of LaVelle's Addition to the Town of Stillwater Montana," on file, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County, Columbus, MT. The discrepancy between dates has yet to be solved – it is possible that Countryman just did not file his plat until 1891, the year before ceded Crow lands were open for settlement.

¹⁷ Kappler, *Indian Affairs*, vol. 1, 432-436.

¹⁸ Federal Writers' Project, *Montana: A State Guide Book*, (Helena: Department of Agriculture, Labor, and Industry, 1939), 196; Brown, *Plainsmen of the Yellowstone*, 357; Babcock, *Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley*, 307-308; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, pp. 26-27; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map: Columbus, Montana, 1897, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana; Kennedy Henry and James Geiger, *Tri-County Atlas: Meagher, Sweet Grass, and Carbon*, (Big Timber, Montana: Tri-County News, 1903), 76, 78-79; Annin, *Horace Countryman*, 2; United State Census Records: Yellowstone County, Montana. Viewed at www.ancestry.com.

¹⁹ Annin, 146-47; Articles of Incorporation, Columbus Mercantile Company, 21 February 1898, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT.

²⁰ United States Census Records; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, pp. 22, 26; Babcock, *An Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley*, 307, 308; Henry and Geiger, *Tri-County Atlas*, 76; *Montana Place Names*, 254-255, Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, 255; "Stillwater County Now a Reality," *The Columbus Democrat*, 22 March 1913.

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With the formation of Stillwater County, Columbus enjoyed a moderate economic boom. The city boosted a modern water system and the Billings & Eastern Montana Power Company provided it with electricity. Columbus had an elementary and grade school and two churches in 1913. The city's commercial district transformed from one of mostly wood frame building facing onto the Northern Pacific Railway in 1907, to one consisting primarily of sandstone and brick buildings by 1920. Businesses included two banks, three hotels, several large mercantiles (including the prominent Columbus Mercantile Company), a barber, cobblers, and only two saloons. In 1913, the city awarded a contract to Livingston, Montana contractor A. L. McLaughlin to construct concrete sidewalks on Pike Avenue and the city installed lampposts in the business district. Two years later, in 1915, the city and the Northern Pacific Railway collaborated to construct a city park on railroad right-of-way opposite the business district. As predicted by its supporters, Columbus was the "key to the resources of the whole Stillwater Country. Its resources are the resources of the county: its inhabitants the true citizens of Stillwater."²¹

Like all Montana cities, Columbus survived two economic depressions, drought, and a mass exodus of homesteaders from the state. The community's prominence as a trade and shipping center enabled it to weather the bad times. Except for the 1930s when the population of Columbus dropped to 834 people, it has steadily grown since 1940 with a current population of 1,748. The Yellowstone Trail in 1912 and, later, US Highway 10 passed through town on Pike Avenue; making Pike Avenue part of the primary east/west highway corridor through Montana. During World War II, Columbus prospered due to its proximity to the Benbow and Mouat chrome mines in the Beartooth Mountains south of town. The ore was trucked to the Northern Pacific Railway at Columbus and US 10. In 1957, Columbus Enterprises acquired a World War II era building that had been used to repair and store trucks used to haul chromium ore from the mines. The company, renamed Timberweld Manufacturing Company, fabricated laminated rafters for farm buildings. That same year, Mouat Industries, Inc. established a plant to produce chromium salts from chromium ore piles stored near the Benbow Mine. The establishment of two industrial facilities stabilized the Columbus economy after the war. The Timberweld company still operates in Columbus.²²

Unlike many towns along the old Northern Pacific Railway, the Columbus economy has been notable for its stability for much of its existence. The town's traditional function as a trade center for farms and ranches in Stillwater County, its location on the railroad and Interstate 90, and its proximity to Billings, Montana's largest city, have kept the town prosperous with a population that has not fluctuated much since 1940. The substantial sandstone buildings in the commercial district best represent the stability of the community and harken back to its days when sandstone was an important building block in many Montana communities.

The Atlas Block

The Atlas Block is not located within precise lots. The legal description reads as follows: the west 25 feet of the east 30 feet of Lot 3 and the west 15 feet of Lot 2 and East 5 feet of Lot 3, Block 1, Lavelle's Addition, Columbus, MT. For the purpose of this nomination, the Atlas Block location will be referred to as Lots 2 and 3, Block 1.

The land encompassing the site of the Atlas Block was originally owned by the Northern Pacific Railway. In June 1864, Congress granted the railroad 44 million acres across North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, and Washington to construct a transcontinental line. In Montana, the grant consisted of 17 million acres comprised of each odd numbered section for forty sections on each side of the proposed route. As previously mentioned, Patrick and Margaret Lavelle purchased approximately 27.5 acres from the railroad in Section 27, T2S, R20E in 1889 and platted the Lavelle Addition to the town of Stillwater (now Columbus) that same year. The Lavelles sold three lots in Block 1 of Lavelle's Addition to William "Bill" White and William "Billy" Garrigus in September 1890, including Lot 3 Block 1. The partners built a small mercantile on

²¹ "Many Improvements Now being Made," *The Columbus Democrat*, 20 September 1913; "Stillwater County – Foster Parent of Territorial Waifs," *The Columbus Democrat*, 22 November 1913; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map: Columbus, Montana, 1912; "Will Build a City Park," *The Columbus News*, 29 April 1915.

²² United States Census Records; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map: Columbus, Montana (1942 update); O.T. Peterson, comp., *First Year Book of the Twin Cities-Aberdeen-Yellowstone Park Trail: The Yellowstone Trail*, (Hettinger, North Dakota: The Yellowstone Trail Association, 1914), 75-76; Montana Highway Department, Official Montana Highway Maps, 1934-1975, Montana Department of Transportation, Helena, Montana; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, p. 26; "New Plants Stimulate Business at Columbus," *Great Falls Tribune*, 9 February 1958.

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the site where the community's first post office was located in 1893. Garrigus's wife, Margaret, was Columbus's first post master. The Lavelle's also sold Lot 2 Block 1 to Jirah Isham "Colonel" Allen in 1890.²³

Joseph B. Annin and Joseph DeHart acquired Lots 2, 3, 11 and 12 of Block 1 in Lavelle's Addition in 1894. A native of western New York, Annin came to Montana in 1889, settling first in Livingston and then in Cokedale where he worked for a mercantile firm. Both Annin and DeHart together relocated to Columbus in October 1892 and opened the Annin-DeHart Mercantile Company on the south side of the tracks. In 1892, Annin with new partners including L. B. Banks and H. I. Grant formed the Columbus Mercantile Company. The company incorporated under that name in February 1898. In March 1898, Annin and Dehart deeded over their interest in Lots 2, 3, 11 and 12 to the Columbus Mercantile Company for \$3,000. That same year, the Columbus Mercantile Company constructed a prominent sandstone building on Pike Avenue that still abuts the Atlas Block to the east. The company also owned Lots 2 and 3 that encompassed the future site of the Atlas Bar.²⁴

In April 1915, the *Columbus News* reported that Michael Jacobs and Thomas Mulvihill had begun construction of a \$20,000 commercial building on Pike Avenue adjacent to the Columbus Mercantile Building. Long time residents of Columbus, Michael Jacobs operated the Montana Sandstone Quarry for many years and Mulvihill owned saloons. Jacobs and Mulvihill hired prolific Billings architect Curtis Oehme to design the building. Oehme had arrived in Billings by 1907 and worked as a draftsman for the famed Montana architectural firm of Link & Haire. He established his own office in Billings by 1909. Oehme was a productive architect, designing many buildings in Billings, southcentral Montana, and northern Wyoming.²⁵

The *Columbus News* reported that the new structure would have a fifty-foot frontage on Pike Avenue and consist of two units with a basement. The building would be divided down the middle by an 18 inch thick stone wall. The east unit, adjacent to the mercantile, would be 25 feet by 100 feet and include a basement. When completed, it would function as a grocery "or one of the other departments" of the Columbus Mercantile Company. The west unit would be 25 feet by 125 feet and also be equipped with a full basement. The basement, however, would be used as a bowling alley, while the ground floor would be a pool hall. The newspaper stated that,

Only the basement and one ground floor will be completed this summer, but the superstructure will be so arranged that another story or two can be readily added. A fine plate glass frontage will be installed with all modern improvements. Excavation with four teams and eight men on the job is already underway, while the work of getting out rock is on at the quarry. The building will be ready for occupancy by August 1.²⁶

By June 1915, the structure's owners decided to add a second story to the building. Also designed by Billings architect Curtis Oehme, the \$10,000 addition to the building would include space for offices and lodge rooms. When the announcement was made, the builders had nearly finished the basement walls of the building and were ready to start on the ground floor.²⁷

²³ Malone, et al., Montana, 173; Deed Book 2, p. 342, Clerk and Records Office, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT; "Plat of LaVelle's Addition to the Town of Stillwater Montana," on file, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County, Columbus, MT; Deed Book 2, p. 656; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, pp. 23-24, 172-73; Deed Book 2, p. 641, Clerk and Records Office, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1897; Cheney, *Names on the Face of Montana*, 59.

²⁴ Deed Book 4, p. 376, Clerk and Records Office, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT; *Progressive Men of the State of Montana*, (Chicago: A. W. Bowen, 1902), 1630-31; Articles of Incorporation, Columbus Mercantile Company, 21 February 1898; Deed Book 4, p. 458, Clerk and Records Office, Stillwater County Courthouse, Columbus, MT; Henry and Geiger, *Tri-County Atlas*, 78-79.

²⁵ Curtis C. Oehme came to the United States from Germany in 1894 to supervise the erection of the German government buildings at the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. He returned to the Fatherland and then formally emigrated to the US in 1904, eventually becoming a naturalized citizen. After opening his own office in Billings, MT, he designed the Kennedy Theater, the Sturm and Drake Block, and the Lincoln School, all in Billings. He also designed the Billings' Broadwater School in 1909, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2002. In November 1917, he ran afoul of anti-German sentiment in Billings during World War I. A crowd of around 650 people forced Oehme to resign from the State Board of Architectural Examiners. He left Billings by 1920 and died in March 1938. Harry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Whithey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)*, Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1970), 447; Polk, Billings City Directories, 1903-1923.

²⁶ Three Buildings Being Erected," *Stillwater County Democrat*, 1 May 1915; "New Building to be Erected," *The Columbus News*, 29 April 1915.

²⁷ "To Build Two Stories," *The Columbus News*, 24 June 1915.

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Work on the building steadily progressed through the summer and into the fall of 1915. In November 1915, the Columbus Mercantile Company sold Lot 3 to Michael Jacobs and Tom Mulvihill but retained ownership of the adjacent lot 2. An agreement also dated November 1915 between the Columbus Mercantile Company and Jacobs and Mulvihill designates that both parties hold one-half interest in the party (center) wall of the building and agree to use in common the entrance and stairway to the second story. This evidence further suggests that Mulvihill, Jacobs, and the Columbus Mercantile Company joined forces to construct the new building.²⁸

By December 1915, the city's fraternal organizations, civic, and religious groups began meeting on the second floor of the building. In January 1916, an overheated chimney in the building ignited a floor joist in the building, causing a small fire. Fortunately, the Rebekahs, Odd Fellows, and Masons were meeting in the building at the time. Their timely intervention limited damage to the building to \$125 (burned floor joist is still in evidence in the Atlas Bar basement). In February 1916, the local fire department held its annual Firehall Ball in the building and the Catholic Altar Society had its annual dance there the same month.²⁹

Annin and Banks Dry Goods (east section of Atlas Block)

In May 1915, the owners of the Columbus Mercantile Company announced the dissolution of their partnership. Founded by Annin and DeHart in 1892, it incorporated in 1898 and constructed a substantial sandstone business block on Pike Avenue, immediately east of the sandstone building that Jacobs and Mulvihill erected. When the company incorporated, DeHart left the partnership and L. B. Banks and Henry I. Grant joined as active partners. In 1915, the partners announced that Grant would run the hardware and grocery part of the business, while Annin and Banks would concentrate on dry goods and "furnishings." The new system, they claimed, would "enable us to specialize to a greater extent in each department than under the former method and will make it possible for our customers to have a greater assortment to select from and more individual service than heretofore." It was the plan of Annin and Banks to relocate their stock into half of the business block then under construction next door. But, until then, the men would operate separately in the Columbus Mercantile Building.³⁰

The new Annin & Banks Company began advertising clearance and moving sales in January 1916 in preparation for the move into their "new and commodious building." The store officially opened in the new Annin-Jacobs-Mulvihill Building during the week of March 16, 1916. Mr. Annin died in 1918, leaving Banks and H. I. Grant to operate the business. Mr. Banks eventually moved to Absarokee to operate a store there. In 1922, John O. and Mabel Miller and Nelson and Margaret Miller acquired the east section of the Atlas Block. These two brothers and their wives in turn gave a partial interest in the east section to Henry I. Grant. It appears that Mr. Grant remained here and ran his store until the late 1930s. After the death of Nelson Miller in 1938, Margaret Miller opened Miller's Dry Goods to support herself and her four children still at home.³¹

Miller's Dry Goods was open six days a week and sold women's, men's and children's clothing. Robert Miller and Betty Jones, two of her children, remember the store well. They both recall the recessed entry and the big windows with street displays. The store was open the length of the building and had metal decorative ceilings. The cash register was near the center of the room. There was a counter in the middle with shelves and flat displays on either side. About two-thirds into the building, the counter stopped where Mrs. Miller displayed hat racks and hats. At the rear of the building was a dressing room to the right and a rest room to the left. A ladder provided access to an elevated loft that served as an office. For supplemental income, Mrs. Miller collected and delivered laundry and dry cleaning two days a week (Saturday and Wednesday) for a Laurel company. The job of delivering the cleaned laundry rotated between her children.³²

²⁸ Deed Book 10, p. 402, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County, Columbus MT; Party Wall and Easement Agreement, 29 November 1915, Miscellaneous Record No. 5, p. 163-64, Office of Clerk and Recorder, Stillwater County, Columbus, MT.

²⁹ "Fire in New Building," *The Columbus News*, 1 December 1915; "Firehall Ball Next Friday," *The Columbus News*, 3 February 1916; "Have a Big Crowd," *The Columbus News*, 24 February 1916.

³⁰ "Announcement!" *The Columbus News*, 27 May 1915; "New Regime at Mercantile," *The Columbus News*, 27 May 1915.

³¹ Advertisement, *The Columbus News*, 6 January 1916; "We Are Moving," *The Columbus News*, 16 March 1916; Deed Book 20, p. 232; Annin, Vol. 3, 23-25; Book 20, p. 233; Robert Miller phone interview with Joan L. Brownell, March 19, 2011; Betty Jones, phone interview with Joan L. Brownell, March 20, 2011. In the 1880s, Matthew Miller, father of John O and Nelson, settled in Merrill, west of Columbus along the Yellowstone River, where he developed a large ranching operation.

³² Miller Interview; Jones Interview.

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Margaret Miller ran her store until the early 1950s when a couple bought the business and renamed it Dana's Dry Goods. In 1956, Mrs. Miller sold the east section of the Atlas Block to Tom Mulvihill. This united the entire building under a single ownership for the first time. The front of the room continues to serve as retail space while the rest of the building is used for storage.³³

The second story of the Annin and Banks store has historically been divided into several rooms. Both Robert Miler and Betty Jones remember that a Dr. Smith had his doctor's office here. Gary Wegner recalls four or five apartments upstairs when he started to work for the Atlas in the early 1960s.³⁴

Atlas Bar (west section of Atlas Block)

Although it was supposed to open on March 17, 1916 in time for St. Patrick's Day, fixtures and other equipment needed for the Atlas Bar to open failed to arrive in time. The owners, Mike Jacobs and Tom Mulvihill, rescheduled the grand opening for March 27th. Promptly at noon on that date, the Atlas opened its doors for customers. The *Columbus News* stated that with the Atlas, "the convenience and accommodation of the customers has been an object with the workers and as a result, the bowling alley and billiard parlors are spacious and well-equipped with chairs and davenportes where a tired man or a spectator of the games can find a comfortable resting place." Over three hundred people attended the grand opening with 150 taking advantage of the free lunch that evening.³⁵

The owners divided the Atlas into five departments. From the main entrance, the patron entered and found himself in the "smoking room and cigar stand." This department sold cigars, cigarettes and chewing gum. The *Columbus News* crowed that "the boys will keep the stock fresh at all times and 'The Best Smoke in Town' [was] their motto." Behind the cigar shop and down a corridor were the billiard and pool tables. There were six tables in a room that was painted all in white with a state-of-the art lighting system. There was a "wonderful array of heads and other taxidermy specimens" decorating the walls that made the billiards parlor "the most beautiful and attractive in the whole state." The third department of the business was the bar. The narrow bar was lit by a large display window and had a sideboard along the east wall of the business. Unlike the billiards parlor, the bar was not built for comfort. Indeed, there were no tables or chairs in it. It was the intent of the owners that patrons would buy a drink in the bar and then move back into the billiards parlor or the bowling alley. As the newspaper reported, "it will be a no loafing place and those who want to rest will have to find accommodations in the billiards room." The fourth and fifth departments of the Atlas were located in the basement. A three-lane bowling alley was located there along with some chairs and a lunchroom where "sandwiches and other edibles" were sold to hungry patrons. The bowling alley was not a standard affair, instead it was "duck pins" consisting of smaller pins and balls.³⁶

The business was run "in strict accordance to Hoyle." Minors, including newspaper boys, were absolutely forbidden from entering the establishment. The cigar stand and billiards parlor were managed by Jacobs, while Mulvihill ran the bar room. The lunchroom in the basement was leased to Nick Weber. The thick stone wall between the east and west units in the building functioned to deaden the noise. Mulvihill and Jacobs also hoped that the lack of chairs in the bar would mean "that the greater part of the noise and rowdyism that usually permeates the barroom will be eliminated." It was the intent of the owners to run a respectable establishment, one in which the people of Columbus would be proud.³⁷

With Prohibition in 1918 and the Volstead Act in 1920, the Atlas was forced to redirect its business. By 1920, Tom Mulvihill left the bar (but kept his ownership of it) and operated a cattle ranch in Stillwater County. Mike Jacobs continued to operate the business as a billiards hall with a soft drink parlor taking the place of the old barroom. An advertisement in the *Columbus News* in January 1927 indicates that Jacobs sold ice cream, soft drinks, cigars, cigarettes, and candy with a "high grade fishing tackle and full line of sporting goods" in the back of the building. The advertisement suggests that the billiard and pool tables were moved upstairs. The 1920 Sanborn map for the Atlas indicates two stores operated on the ground floor of the building. In late January 1927, Mike Jacobs died of heart failure. His son, Harry, leased the Atlas to George Knox, who had been the day manager of the operation during the winters since 1923. Tom Mulvihill was back in

³³ Miller Interview; Jones Interview; 1955 photograph of Columbus, on file, Archives, Museum of the Beartooths, Columbus, MT

³⁴ Miller Interview; Jones Interview; Gary Wagner Interview.

³⁵ "Opening Next Week," *The Columbus News*, 16 March 1916; "Finest Amusement Parlors in State to Open Monday," *The Columbus News*, 23 March 1916; "New Billiard Hall will be Open Monday Noon," *Stillwater County Democrat*, 25 March 1916; "Atlas Opens," *The Columbus News*, 30 March 1916.

³⁶ "Finest Amusement Parlors in State to Open Monday."

³⁷ Ibid.

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charge of the billiards parlor by 1930. When Prohibition ended in March 1933, Mulvihill was one of two men to pay \$300 for a liquor license in Columbus. The Atlas re-opened as a bar in April 1933.³⁸

The second story of the Atlas Bar experienced several incarnations over the years. As previously mentioned, even before the building was finished, fraternal organizations held meetings in the large open room over the Atlas. In the late 1930s and 1940s, Ruth Ewer, Bob Miller and Betty Jones all remember the bowling alley upstairs of the Atlas where duck-pin bowling ruled³⁹. Gary Wegner also remembers the rear of the building partitioned off for a poker room and during prohibition, moonshine liquor was reportedly stored here. Ruth Ewer, born in 1918, occasionally went to dances in the basement of the Atlas in her 20's where local bands played good music. Gary Wegner said that there was a small bar downstairs and a coat check with a marble slab for the counter. The basement wood floor eventually rotted out and has been removed.⁴⁰

The Atlas Bar has functioned as a saloon since the end of Prohibition in April 1933. Until his death in 1959, Tom Mulvihill owned and operated the Atlas Bar. In March 1949, he incorporated the business as the New Atlas Club. His son, Thomas P. "TP" Mulvihill, followed his father and ran the establishment until he retired in the 1980s. TP's daughter, Lavelle, then owned and operated the Atlas Bar until 1997 when she sold it to Mickey Barrett and her two children, Lars Swanson and Dana Burchell.⁴¹

Columbus Sandstone Company

In November 1913, the editor of the *Columbus Democrat* wrote that "Columbus is a town pleasingly original. In many and prominent features it differs from any other small towns" What set Columbus off from other towns in southcentral Montana was the large number of substantial sandstone commercial buildings that lined its main street like the Atlas Block. The sandstone was obtained from a quarry in the bluffs just north of the town. In 1895, Missouri native Ben Hager established the quarry and formed Hager & Company to provide stone for local building projects. The Little Stone Church is the first known building in Columbus to be constructed of the sandstone. It was followed by the Calhoun & Adams Livery in 1897 and the Columbus Mercantile Company in 1898.⁴²

In March 1899, Hager, Joseph Soss, and H.S. Hepner incorporated the Montana Sandstone Company with capital stock worth \$3,000. The following year, in 1900, they sold the quarry to Montana Building Company president H.L. Frank, who obtained the contract to build the Montana State Capitol building in 1900. Frank traveled to Chicago to recruit master stonecutters for the capitol project. While in Chicago, he convinced Michael Jacobs, an Italian emigrant, to come to Columbus to look over the quarry in 1900. Born in Tollerio, Italy in 1862, Michael Angelo Jacobucci learned the stonecutters art in granite and marble quarries near his home town. He emigrated to the United States in 1877 and changed his last name to Jacobs. A Chicago construction company that specialized in rock work hired him and he studied architecture in night school. Because of allegations of graft and fraud in the state capitol project, Frank leased the Columbus quarry to Jacobs, J. B. Annin, and William H. Norton. Annin and Norton, who were prominent Columbus businessmen, placed Jacobs in charge of the quarry operation.⁴³

³⁸ Prohibition began in Montana in late 1918. It took effect nationally in 1920. Malone, et al., *Montana*, 265; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 1, pp. 265-66, 293-94; Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1920; Advertisement, *The Columbus News*, 6 January 1927; "Daddy Mike' Succumbs . . .," "Geo. Knox to Operate Atlas," *The Columbus News*, 3 February 1927; United States Census Records, 1920, 1930; "Application Made for Beer Licenses," *The Columbus News*, 6 April 1933.

³⁹ The bowling alley was originally located in the basement but apparently moved upstairs at a later time.

⁴⁰ Ewer Interview; Miller interview; Jones Interview; Wagner Interview.

⁴¹ Business Entity Search at Montana Secretary of State, available at www.app.mt.gov; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 3, pp. 45, 46; "Services for Elderly Resident," *The Columbus News*, 10 September 1959; Mickey Brown, "Historical Memories Gathered for Keepsakes," *The Stillwater County News*, 23 April 1997; "Thomas Patric Mulvihill," *The Stillwater County News*, 15 November 1995; Mickey Barrett Interview with Joan L. Brownell, 4 March 2011, Columbus, MT.

⁴² "Stillwater County," *Columbus Democrat*; Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, 347; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, pp. 26, 31; United States Census Records; Gayle Hauge, "Quarry Has Rich History in Region," *The Stillwater County News*, 14 December 1994; Henry and Geiger, *Tri-County Atlas*, 78-79.

⁴³ Article of Incorporation, The Montana Sandstone Company, Montana Secretary of State's Office, Helena, Mt; Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, 347; Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, p. 32; Annin, *Ibid*, vol. 1, pp. 265-266; "Daddy Mike' Jacobs Succumbs to Attack of Heart Failure," *The Columbus News*, 27 January 1927; United States Census Records; Dorothy M. Johnson, "The Graft That Failed," *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, vol. 9, no. 4 (Autumn 1959), 7; Hauge, "Quarry," Carroll Van

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Within a year, Jacobs had substantially expanded the quarry operation. He brought several Italian master stonecutters and their families to Columbus and hired local men to do the manual labor. The Northern Pacific Railway constructed a spur line to the quarry. The operation included equipment sheds, a large building housing an office and cutting rooms, a blacksmith shop, derricks, and loading docks. At its height in 1901, the quarry employed 72 men. The state capitol contract caused the closest thing to a boom that Columbus experienced. The population grew from 175 people in 1900 to 521 people by 1910. The commercial development along the city's main street grew accordingly as did the number of dwellings between the commercial district and the quarry.⁴⁴

With the completion of the capitol contract in 1903, Frank rescinded the lease to Jacobs, Annin, and Norton and leased it solely to Mike Jacobs beginning in 1906. He operated the quarry for over two decades. Sandstone from the quarry was used to construct government buildings in Butte, Helena, and Billings. It was used for a school building and masonic temple in Missoula and a hotel and high school in Havre. In 1910, the company failed to obtain the contract for the State Capitol's wings, losing to the Kain Granite Company of Helena. Jacobs leased much of the Montana Sandstone Quarry's equipment and continued to quarry stone from it for several years. The sandstone was used in many of the commercial buildings on Pike Street in Columbus, as well as Jacobs' residence, the Calhoun Garage on Pratt Street, and several other structures in the Columbus area. Along with the buildings, Columbus sandstone provided ornamental facades, finishing stone, cemetery monuments, and headstones.⁴⁵

Architectural Significance

The Atlas Block stands as a important architectural building along the main street of Columbus, Montana. The Atlas Block is an excellent example of Western Commercial Architecture constructed of stone and is one of three sandstone buildings within this block that are still extant along Pike Avenue. All share common walls and represent examples of the Western Commercial architectural style of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century with basic storefront organization and symmetrical upper facades exhibiting various forms of ornamental details. The characteristics of the Western Commercial architectural style are typical of most western downtown commercial districts. They have a long, rectangular plan that is perpendicular to the street and have flat or gently sloping roofs hidden by a parapet or pediment. They stand one to three stories in height, have two to five bay organization and are usually constructed of brick. The street level generally houses stores, while offices, meeting halls, rooms or hotels occupy the upper levels. A typical storefront consists of a central recessed entry flanked to each side by large plate glass windows. Transom lights across the entrance and display windows illuminate the interior. Window openings are symmetrical and dominate the upper façade wall, and integrate different elements to accent the window treatments or create a horizontal pattern.⁴⁶

West, "A Landscape of Statehood: The Montana State Capitol," *Montana The Magazine of Western History*, vol. 37, no. 4 (Autumn 1987), 73-74.

⁴⁴ Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, pp. 31-32; Babcock, *Illustrated History of the Yellowstone Valley*, 308; Hauge, "Quarry;" Henry and Geiger, *Tri-County Atlas*, 78; United States Census Records; Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1907, 1912.

⁴⁵ Annin, *They Gazed on the Beartooths*, vol. 2, pp. 32-33; Annin, *Ibid*, vol. 1, p. 266; Spritzer, *Roadside History of Montana*, 347; Hauge, "Quarry."

⁴⁶ The discussion on the western commercial architectural style is drawn primarily from two historic architectural contexts: Mary McCormick, *Downtown Bismarck Historic District*, National Register of Historic Places Nomination, 2000, On file, North Dakota State Historic Preservation Office, Bismarck, ND; also City of Pine Island, Minnesota "Survey of Historic Buildings: Historic Context" at http://cc.pineislandmn.com/downloads/survey_of_historic_buildingshistoric_context.doc;

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
☐ previously listed in the National Register
☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office
☐ Other State agency
☐ Federal agency
☐ Local government
☐ University
☐ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.0

(do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	12	636232	5054992	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

The Atlas Block occupies portions of two city lots on the north side of Pike Avenue between Pratt Street and 5th Street in Columbus, Montana. Pike Avenue is the city's main commercial street and parallels the Montana Rail Link Railroad (formerly the Northern Pacific Railway) tracks. The west and east sides of the property are bounded by commercial buildings and the rear of the property is delineated by an alley. The Atlas Block is located in the NW¼ NW¼ NW¼ of Section 27, T2S, R20E (Columbus West, MT USGS Quadrangle Map, 1956).

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The Atlas Block occupies portions of Lots 2 and 3 of Block 1 of the Lavelle Addition to the City of Columbus.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jon Axline, Helena, MT and Joan L. Brownell, Fishtail, MT
organization State Historic Preservation Office date March 2011
street & number 1410 8th Avenue telephone 406-444-3647
city or town Helena, state MT zip code 59620
e-mail _____

Atlas Block
Name of Property

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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive black and white photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Atlas Block

City or Vicinity: Columbus

County: Stillwater

State: MT

Photographer: Joan L. Brownell

Date Photographed: February-March 2011

Description of Photograph(s) and number: **See Below**

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Mickey Barrett, Lars Swanson and Dana Burchell

street & number 528 E. Pike Avenue

telephone (406) 322-4033

city or town Columbus

state MT

zip code 59019

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, PO Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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National Park Service

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Aerial View



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Photolog

Name of Property: Atlas Block

City or Vicinity: Columbus

County: Stillwater

State: MT

Photographer: Joan L. Brownell

Date Photographed: February-March 2011

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

0001 of 0011. Atlas Block, south side, view to north/northeast

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0001

0002 of 0011. Atlas Block, south and west sides, view to northeast

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0002

0003 of 0011. Atlas Block, south side, view to north/northeast

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0003

0004 of 0011. Atlas Block, north and west sides, view to south

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0004

0005 of 0011. Atlas Block, north and east sides, view to southwest

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0005

0006 of 0011. Pike Avenue Streetscape, Atlas Block at far left, view to northwest

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0006

All historic photographs are courtesy of Museum of the Beartooths, Columbus, MT

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0007

0007 of 0011. Columbus, MT 1908, Pike Avenue in foreground, view to northwest

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0007

0008 of 0011. Aerial of Columbus, Atlas Block right of center, view to north/northeast

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0008

0009 of 0011. 1936 Pike Avenue with Atlas Block at center, view to northwest

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0009

0010 of 0011. Circa 1950s Aerial, Atlas Block left of center, view to northwest

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0010

0011 of 0011. Interior of Atlas Bar, Brunswick Bar Bar, 2011

MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0011

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National Register Photographs



MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0001



MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0002

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MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0003



MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0004

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MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0005



MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0006

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MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0007



MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0008

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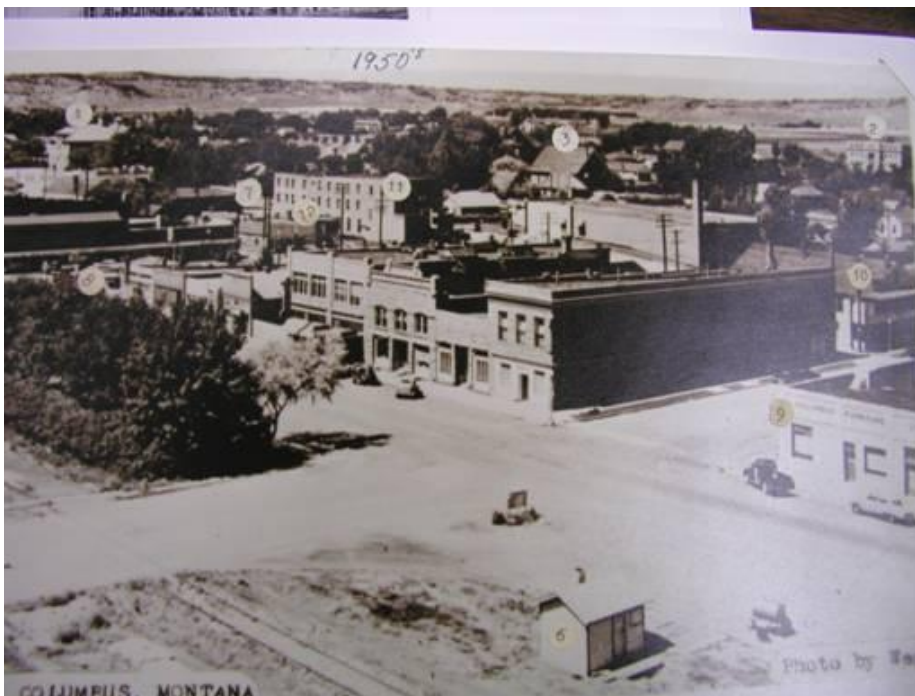
County and State

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

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MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0009



MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0010

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National Park Service

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MT_StillwaterCounty_AtlasBlock_0011